

Minutes from the WeCAN Meeting held at Westfield City Hall Assembly Room on
September 25, 2012 at 7 pm.

Disclaimer: I hope you will find these notes helpful. They are not a complete representation of the meeting, but rather the highlights of topics discussed. Feel free to contact Carrie or Derek at Westfield City Hall: communications@westfield.in.gov or (317) 804-3001 if you have any questions.

September 25, 2012

Agenda

- I. Managed landscapes in subdivisions -
Amanda Smith, Hamilton County Parks
and John South, Hamilton County Soil
and Water Conservation District
- II. Proposed Utility Sale Update - Mayor
Cook



**I. Managed landscapes in subdivisions - Amanda Smith, Hamilton County Parks
and John South, Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District**

Amanda was first to present. Her presentation dealt with backyard conservation and the use of native plants around your home. Her presentation can be found [HERE](#).

Q: Is there an effort to encourage local growers, specifically Heartland Growers, to use native plants rather than annuals?

A: The best thing to do is to talk with the growers and ask that they use more native plants. Also, Meijer sells native plants in their nursery.

Q: Is there a program in place that sponsors native plants in neighborhood common areas?

A: Yes, it is mentioned in John South's presentation below.

John South presented an overview of the Backyard Conservation Program. Part of his presentation included a section on pond enhancements. His presentation can be found [HERE](#).

Comment from audience: On the Hamilton County website, there is not a very clear distinction between "managed" backyard conservation and backyard conservation that is overgrown.

Comment from audience: It would be nice to see some sort of education on conservation/managed landscapes in local paper such as the Current.

II. Proposed Utility Transfer Update - Mayor Cook

Mayor Cook opened his portion asking for general questions before getting into the utility discussion.

Q: What's the master plan for trees along the streets?

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A: Westfield has small right of ways (ROW) which makes it difficult to put in trees along the road or build a median with trees in the middle. Carmel is able to do it because as they redevelop the streets, they are able to expand the road to allow for trees. When Westfield is able to widen a road, adding trees is always a goal.

Mayor Cook began the utility conversation by giving the history of how the City got to this point. He spoke on the utility infrastructure improvements needed and the recent council approved rate increases. He spoke on the purpose of looking into transferring the utility assets. He said there are limited ways of generating revenue without raising taxes. Due to Westfield's growth needs, we need to grow the commercial tax base.

A evaluation group was put together to research the idea of transferring the utility. A request for proposal (RFP) was sent out. Three companies came back with bids. Eventually, Citizen's Energy Group was chosen as the best option of the three bids. It was announced a couple of weeks ago that a Memorandum of Understanding was reached with Citizens. Moving forward, the City plans an extensive public education outreach program up to the public hearing before the City Council on October 29th.

Mayor stated that a portion of the proceeds from the proposed transfer will go toward infrastructure improvements such as intersection improvements and connector trails. A survey was created in order for residents to vote on the project they would like to see as first priority. The survey can be found on the City's Facebook page or website.

Mayor pointed out that Citizens Energy Group will come to Westfield as a for-profit company – meaning they will pay property taxes – approx. \$2 million dollars annually. Right now, the utility brings in only \$800,000 in revenue. Therefore, the City will see a surplus in funds received based on these numbers.

Q: Won't our water rates increase?

A: Rates will not change in the short term. The City Council passed a rate ordinance this year and rates will continue to stay on the trajectory set by this ordinance until 2016. Regardless of whether the City or Citizens owns the water and wastewater utilities, rates will increase due to system investments that will be needed primarily for growth. Just as with other utilities (i.e. gas, electricity, cable), rates will go up in order to meet ongoing development. Citizens estimates that efficiencies under its ownership will reduce rate increases by 16 percent by the year 2020 compared to if the City retained ownership of the utilities.

Q: How well does CEG meet or exceed the expectation set forth by the City?

A: Very well. Their plan to keep all employees, secure Westfield's water supply for the future, and provide outstanding customer service were all reasons we feel that Citizens is a good choice.

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Q: Has there been talk of alignment between the City and Township – like Fishers?

A: Yes, however cooperation already exists.

Q: Will CEG switch people over to gas if they are currently with Vectren?

A: No. Vectren is a competitor and has protected zones in Westfield that Citizens cannot overtake.

Q: How is trash affected on future bills?

A: Residents will still see a trash fee on their bill. Citizens will collect the money and forward it on to the City. The City is in complete control of the trash. Citizens Energy has nothing to do with it.

The next WeCAN meeting is on **Tuesday, October 30th, at 7pm** at the City Hall Assembly Room.

If you have any topic suggestions or issues that you have questions on, please don't hesitate to contact us at communications@westfield.in.gov.

For updated announcements and information from the past meetings, please visit the WeCAN Website: <http://sites.google.com/site/wecaninformation/>